

CHAPTER 15

The First Day's Chase

A few days later, we met another ship, badly misnamed the *Delight*. To Ahab's same burning question, the captain of the *Delight* replied by pointing to the splintered wreck of a whaleboat upon her beams.

"Have ye killed him?" asked Ahab.

"The harpoon has not been made yet that can do that," said the captain of the *Delight*.

"I've got his death right here!" yelled Ahab, holding up his newly made harpoon.

"God help you then," cried the captain of the *Delight*. "I've lost five splendid men to

that cursed White Whale! You are sailing on their tomb!"

In the past, Starbuck had repeatedly asked the old man to give up the mad chase for the hated White Whale. Again now, he pleaded with Ahab to turn back. "We have the cargo. Why not let the men return safely to the wives and their children?"

For a moment Ahab seemed to soften. He spoke longingly of his own wife and son. "My boy is waking now, sitting up in bed. And his mother is telling him about me, how I am at sea, but how I will return to play with him again." Ahab paused, then he added, "But there is some monster inside me pushing me on recklessly, making me do what I should not. No, Starbuck, I will never be content until I have killed the evil Moby Dick!"

At daybreak, Ahab sniffed the sea air and declared, "A whale is near."

Soon we all sensed the peculiar smell that

the sperm whale gives off, and the old man rapidly changed the ship's course.

"I will make the first sighting of the whale myself," cried Ahab. "I must have the doubloon for sighting the whale first. Ahab *alone!*" And he pointed to the gold piece he'd nailed up long ago.

Ahab made a rope basket for himself and sat in it as two men hoisted him up to the main-mast for a full view of the sea. When he was about two-thirds of the way up, far higher than the other look-outs, he raised a cry like a sea gull, "There she blows—there she blows! A hump like a snow hill! It is Moby Dick!"

The men on deck rushed to the rigging for a glimpse of the famous whale they had been after so long. Moby Dick was there—a mile or so ahead. Every roll of the sea revealed his high sparkling hump and his silent spouts in the air.

"And did none of ye see him before?" cried

Ahab to all the men perched around in the rigging.

"I did, almost that same instant," said Tashtego, "and I cried out."

"Not the *same* instant, though," cried Ahab. "No, the doubloon is mine. Fate reserved it for me—for me *alone*! Only I could make Moby Dick appear!"

Ahab shouted orders in excitement. "Stand by, stand by! Lower me, Mr. Starbuck. Quicker, quicker! Get the boats ready." And he slid through the air to the deck.

Soon all the boats but Starbuck's were lowered, shooting ahead in the chase. Ahab saw only the wrinkles of the White Whale's head and the bright bubbles dancing playfully by his side. The broken pole of a whaler's lance still projected out of the White Whale's back. He seemed so calm and serene, but only because the terribleness of his jaw was hidden beneath the water. Suddenly, the whale

slowly rose up, forming a high white arch with his body. Then he waved his tail, almost as a warning, and swiftly dipped below the surface of the whirling pool he had just left.

The three boats floated in the stillness, awaiting the return of Moby Dick. Ahab peered over the side of his boat into the depths of the sea. A white living spot was rising quickly, revealing two long crooked rows of white, glistening teeth. It was Moby Dick's open mouth, yawning beneath Ahab's boat, looking like a marble burial room.

Ahab gave one sidelong sweep with his steering oar to whirl the boat around, away from the monstrous whale. This brought the bow round to face Moby Dick's head. But with the amazingly evil intelligence he seemed to possess, Moby Dick caught onto the plan. He cunningly ducked under and butted the boat with his head.

His long narrow jaw opened. Now he had

the bow in his mouth and one of his teeth caught in an oar-lock. The blue-white inside of his jaw was within six inches of Ahab's head when Moby Dick began to shake the boat gently, as a cat will do with a mouse in its jaws.

Fedallah sat still with his arms crossed, unafraid, while the rest of the crew tumbled over each other to reach the stern, away from the whale's open jaws.

Ahab, in a frenzy at being so close to getting his enemy but now helpless in its grasp, grabbed at the jawbone with his bare hands and tried to wrench it from its grip on the boat. But the jaw slipped from his grasp, and as it slid away, it came down on the boat like a huge pair of scissors and bit the boat completely in two!

The men were thrown into the water while Moby Dick angrily circled the area, churning up the water in his wake as if working himself up to another and more deadly attack.

The other boats hovered nearby, unharmed, still not daring to approach the tossing Ahab or the other crew members for fear of signaling another attack by the whale.

Luckily, the *Pequod* was able to sail between the whale and the swimming men. As Moby Dick sullenly swam off, the other boats flew to the rescue.

Ahab, half-blinded by the sea, was dragged into Stubb's boat. He struggled to his feet, crying, "Hands off me! The blood is running through my veins again. Set the sail! Man the oars! After the whale!"

But even with the added rowing power of the crew members just rescued, the boat could not match the speed of the whale. And Moby Dick sped away.

When everyone was finally back on board the *Pequod*, Ahab again spoke of the doubloon. "That gold is mine," he said. "I have earned it. But I will let it stay here until the

White Whale is dead. Whichever of ye first sights him on the day he is killed, this gold is that man's. And if on that day I should again be the one to sight Moby Dick, then ten times that sum shall be divided among all of ye! Away now!"

And so saying, he took his position with his leg in the cutout opening on deck and stood there till the dawn, sleeping and rousing himself.

Thus ended the first day of the hunting of Moby Dick.

CHAPTER 16

The Second Day's Chase

The next day, the cry came again from the masthead, "There she blows—she blows!—she blows!—right ahead!"

"Aye, aye!" cried Stubb. "I knew it. Ye can't escape! Blow on and split your pout, O whale. The mad fiend himself is after ye! Ahab will dam off your blood, as a miller shuts his water-gate upon the stream!"

The excitement of the chase had spread to all the crew. Whatever fears or forebodings they might have felt before were gone in their growing awe of Ahab, and the thirty men worked as one man toward the old captain's

fatal goal.

Hardly had Ahab been hoisted to his high perch on the mast than a triumphant cry burst from thirty lungs on board. Less than a mile away, Moby Dick burst into view! Not by his calm, lazy spouting was he seen, but rather by his wondrous breaching—the tossing of his entire body out of the water and high into the air. This breaching was Moby Dick's act of defiance !

“There she breaches!” came the cry.

“Breach to the sun for your last time, Moby Dick!” cried Ahab. “Your time has come! My harpoon is ready! The boats—stand by!”

Ahab dropped from his perch and onto the deck. “Lower away!” he cried as soon as he reached his boat.

As if to strike terror into them by being the first to attack, Moby Dick had turned and now headed straight for the three whaleboats.

This time Ahab headed straight for the

White Whale's forehead, because the animal sees better from the sides than from the front. But before they could reach him, and while all three boats were still within the whale's sight, Moby Dick churned himself into a furious speed. With open jaws and lashing tail, he rushed among the boats. Ignoring the irons darting into him from every boat, he crossed and recrossed, tangling all the lines.

Caught and twisted in the mazes of lines, harpoons, and lances, Moby Dick came flashing and dripping up to the very bow of Ahab's boat. There was only one thing for the old man to do—cut his line loose. But as he did so, the White Whale made a sudden rush among the remaining tangled lines. This pulled the boats of Stubb and Flask towards him, dashing them together, then overturning them like roaring waves would do to two sea shells. Then the whale dove down into the sea, disappearing in a boiling whirlpool.

The two crews frantically circled in the waters, with Flask bobbing up and down like an empty bottle, twitching his legs upward to escape the dreaded jaws of the whale, and with Stubb calling out to be ladled up.

Ahab was about to head into the whirlpool to rescue those whom he could when his boat suddenly shot up from the sea. It moved as if pulled skyward by invisible wires. Moby Dick had dashed his broad forehead against the bottom of Ahab's boat and sent it spinning over and over in the air. Finally it landed, upside down, and Ahab and his men struggled out from under it.

Soon, as if satisfied with his work for the time being, the whale pushed his forehead through the ocean, trailing after him the intertangled lines.

As before, the *Pequod* bore down to the rescue and dropped a boat for the floating crewmen, their oars, and their harpoons. Ahab

was picked up clinging to his boat's broken half. Luckily, there were no fatalities, only bad cuts and sprained shoulders, wrists, and ankles.

Back on the deck of the *Pequod*, Ahab half-hung on Starbuck's shoulder. His ivory leg had been snapped off, leaving one short sharp splinter.

"Old Ahab is untouched!" he cried. "Not even a broken bone. Here, give me that lance for a cane, then gather the men together."

When the crew had gathered before him, Ahab searched the faces for one man—Fedallah. But the Manillian was nowhere!

"Aye, sir," said Stubb. "He was caught among the tangles of your line. I thought I saw him being dragged under."

"*My line! My line? Gone? That is an omen of death—my death!*" cried Ahab. "Quick! Collect all the irons now. If I have to go around this globe ten times, aye, or even dive straight

through it, I will slay Moby Dick yet! “

“Great God!” cried Starbuck. “You will never capture him, old man. No more of this! It’s madness. For two days you chased him, and for two days our boats were broken to splinters. Your very leg was snatched from under you. You’ve had enough warnings. Must we chase this murderous fish till he drags every last one of us to the bottom of the sea?”

“This whole act was decreed a billion years before this ocean rolled,” cried Ahab. “Laugh, my men. ‘Tis said that drowning things rise twice to the surface, then rise again to sink for evermore. So with Moby Dick. Two days he’s floated. Tomorrow will be the third—he’ll rise once more—only to spout his last!”

Then to himself, Ahab muttered, “Fedallah had predicted he would go before me. But he said I would see him once again before I die. Now *there’s* a riddle to baffle my brain, but one that I will solve.”

CHAPTER 17

The Strange Prediction Comes True

The morning of the third day dawned fair. Once again the lone night look-out on the masthead was relieved by crowds of daylight look-outs who dotted every mast.

With a quickly made wooden leg to replace the lost ivory one, Ahab was again hoisted up the mast in his rope basket. After an hour of searching the sea, he spied the spout. Three shrieks of "There she blows!" went up from the mastheads.

"Forehead to forehead I meet thee this third time, Moby Dick!" called Ahab. Then, patting

the masthead lovingly, he added, "Good-bye, masthead. I'm going down. Keep a good eye on the whale while I'm gone. We'll talk tomorrow, no tonight, when the White Whale lies down there, tied by head and tail."

As Ahab was being lowered, the riddle came back to his thoughts. He whispered to himself, "But what was it that Fedallah said? He would go before me, yet he would be seen again. But where? I've sailed far from where he sank. No, Fedallah, you may have been right in your prediction for yourself, but you were wrong about Ahab!"

As Ahab prepared to climb into his boat, he turned to Starbuck. "Shake hands with me, man. I am old, very old."

His eyes filling with tears, Starbuck pleaded, "Oh, my captain, do not go! A brave man weeps and begs you."

"Lower away!" cried Ahab, shaking his mate's arm from him.

The boats were lowered, but they had not gone far when a signal from the masthead, a downward-pointed arm, told Ahab the whale had gone down.

As the waves hammered on the bow of his boat, Ahab cried, "Beat on, beat on! I'm not afraid. I shall be there when Moby Dick rises. Oh, Fedallah, you were wrong. There will be no coffin and no hearse for me. Remember, only a *rope* can kill me! Ha! Ha!"

Suddenly the waters around them swirled and swelled in broad circles. A low rumbling sound was heard. Everyone held their breaths as trailing ropes, harpoons, lances, and finally the whale shot up from the sea.

Maddened by the previous day's fresh irons in him, Moby Dick came head-on, angrily churning his tail among the boats, spilling out irons, and dashing in part of their bows.

As the whale turned and shot by them again, a cry went up. Lashed to the whale's

back, amid the tangled ropes was the half-torn body of Fedallah! His opened eyes were turned full upon old Ahab!

The harpoon dropped from the captain's hand, and he drew in a long breath. "So thou spoke true, Fedallah," he whispered. "And now I do see thee again after thy death. And thy prediction about thy hearse was right too. Aye, the hearse was not made by human hands. Thy hearse is Moby Dick... ! But where is the second hearse?" Ahab eyed his restless crew.

"Down, men!" he cried. "The first one that tries to jump from this boat I'm in, him I will harpoon. Ye are not other men; ye are my arms and my legs, and so ye will obey me. Now where's that whale?"

Moby Dick swam away from the boats at top speed and on his way out to sea. Ahab turned to follow. He was just passing the *Pequod* when Starbuck called down from the

deck.

“Oh, Ahab, it is not too late to turn back. See! Moby Dick is not after you. It is you, you, that is madly after *him!*”

But Ahab commanded his boat to continue to follow the whale. Glancing up at his ship, he saw Tashtego, Queequeg, and Daggoo eagerly climbing to the three mastheads. He saw the oarsmen working on the two damaged boats which had been hoisted to the *Pequod's* side. Through the portholes as he sped by, he caught flying glimpses of Stubb and Flask, busy among bundles of new irons and lances.

Ahab's oarsmen had trouble rowing. Sharks had gathered around his boat and were biting at the oars with every dip.

“Pay them no mind,” cried Ahab. “Those teeth are only rowlocks for your oars. Pull on!”

“But, sir, at every bite the blades grow smaller and smaller.”

“They will last long enough. Pull on! Do

these sharks expect to feast on the whale or or old Ahab?"

When they were alongside the White Whale's flank, the smoky mist from his spout curled around them. Ahab arched his body back and with both arms raised, he darted his fierce iron and his even fiercer curse into the hated Moby Dick!

The White Whale writhed and rolled his flank against the small boat, turning it partly over. Three crewmen were tossed into the sea, but Ahab clung to the raised side and stayed inside the boat.

As the whale darted off into the sea, Ahab yelled to the men to hold the line fastened to Moby Dick. But the line could not withstand the strain, and it snapped in the empty air!

As Moby Dick turned, he spied the black hull of the *Pequod*. Thinking maybe it was the cause of all his trouble, he bore down on its oncoming prow with his jaws ready to strike.

“The whale! The ship!” cried the cringing oarsmen.

“The ship, the ship! Tilt, tilt, O sea! Let Ahab slide the last time downward on his prey. Dash on, my men! Will ye not save my ship?” shouted Ahab wildly.

On board the *Pequod*, men stared, babbled, prayed—their enchanted eyes fixed upon the whale that was rushing straight toward them.

“Oh, Ahab!” cried Starbuck. “Look at thy work. The whale drives toward us. My God, stand by me now. The grinning whale prepares to gulp us all!”

Moby Dick’s solid white forehead smashed the ship’s starboard bow with vengeance. Men shook and fell flat on their faces as mountain torrents of water began pouring in through the break.

“The second hearse! The ship itself is the second hearse!” cried Ahab, looking up from his boat. “Its wood could only be American!”

Aye, those were Fedallah's words—a hearse made from American wood."

The whale turned away from the sinking ship, dove beneath its keel, and came up quietly a few yards from Ahab's boat. He lay there, unmoving, for a time.

"I turn my body from the sun," cried Ahab. "O *Pequod*, my death-glorious ship. Must ye then perish and sink without me? Am I cut off from a captain's pride—going down with my ship? How lonely is my death after such a lonely life! I roll towards thee, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale. To the last I shall fight thee! In hate I shall spit my last breath at thee! Tow me to pieces while I chase thee, tied to thee, damned whale! *Thus* I give up the spear! "

With all the power in him, Ahab hurled the harpoon. The stricken whale darted forward with lightning speed, tangling the harpoon's line with a jerk. As Ahab stooped to untangle

it, a turn of the rope caught him round the neck, and he was shot out of the boat. Before the crew knew what was happening, he was gone. . . killed by a rope!

For an instant, the crewmen stood still, as in a trance. They they turned. "The ship? Great God, where is the *Pequod*?"

Through the mist they saw the *Pequod* fading into the sea, the faithful harpooners still maintaining the look-outs on her high masts. Then a whirlpool of water seized the only remaining boat and spun it about round and round until all its crew, every oar, every lance pole, every floating chip of the *Pequod*—everything was carried to the bottom of the ocean.

And the great White Whale sped away.

And the sea rolled on as it had been rolling for five thousand years. . . .

CHAPTER 18

I Alone Survived

The story's done, and I alone survived the wreck.

As I was being pulled round and round toward the center of the whirlpool, a black bubble shot up from its center and burst. A coffin-shaped life buoy burst from the bubble and floated by my side. Even after death, my best friend had saved my life. It was Queequeg's coffin-buoy.

I floated on it one whole day and one whole night. The sharks did me no harm as they glided by, and the savage sea hawks sailed

right over me with their beaks shut tightly.

I had much to think about during those solitary sea-borne hours. I thought of Ahab's drive unto death, and of the White Whale's answering fierceness. And the memory of Queequeg's kindness buoyed my spirits, just as his chest now held my body afloat.

The second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the wandering *Rachel*, still looking for her missing children. But she found only me, Ishmael, another orphan.